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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Iran Hamas

PARIS - Wednesday, February 01, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Iran
Hamas

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

With the exception of Le Figaro, domestic stories dominate today's front pages and commentaries focus on PM Villepin's stance towards unemployment. His contracts for employing young workers are widely criticized by left-leaning media, while on the right, the opinion is that the Prime Minister's resolution of this issues could "make or break him" as far as his Presidential aspirations. The tug-of-war between Mittal and Arcelor continues to elicit commentaries, including about France's economic protectionism. But as reported in La Tribune, workers unions and political circles in France and Europe "are united against the hostile takeover." Still, the editorial comments: "Mittal the man is neither an amateur nor a bandit. He is a knowledgeable entrepreneur. Before condemning him outright, why not give him a chance?"

In international news Iran and the "shared position of the EU and Washington" is front page news in Le Figaro, while Le Monde carries an op-ed entitled: "India, Between Iran and the West." (See Part C) The Quartet's position on Hamas is noted in Le Monde, while Le Figaro reports how "Mahmoud Abbas is trying to influence Hamas." (See Part C)

Le Parisien interviews FM Douste Blazy on the Middle East: "Hamas must publicly renounce all forms of violence and recognize the existence of the state of Israel." He also says he will meet soon with Mahmoud Abbas, but "for the rest, our conditions are clear. We are intransigent on the principles." When asked about Iran, he replied "We (members of the Security Council) have agreed to present a very firm resolution on February 2. In March, if necessary, the Security Council could act."

The State of the Union was scheduled too late for the written press to report on the President's message. But Pascal Riche in Liberation anticipates in an article entitled: "Bush Condemned to Being Pugnacious," "the President, for whom everything is going poorly, will choose a deliberately aggressive tone. He will remain firm on Iraq, despite the fact that a majority of Americans regrets the war. A year ago, President Bush began his second term victoriously, a year later the lack of reforms, Katrina and the fiasco that ensued have shattered the image of the leader to smithereens." Le Figaro, reporting on the Senate's confirmation of Samuel Alito, comments: "President Bush has already scored before giving his State of the Union address." La Croix drafts a portrait of Samuel Alito who "was supposed to be confirmed last evening despite last minute obstruction tactics from the Democrats." "The confirmation," notes La Croix, "should, in a very timely manner, come only hours before the State of the Union."

The satirical weekly, Le Canard Enchaîné, carries a half-page story entitled: "Travelers to the U.S. Victims of a Typically French Can-of-Worms." The take on the article is that it is all "Sarkozy's fault" for having bungled the Imprimerie Nationale passport issue. "Sarko, America's best friend is unable to deliver the necessary passports to French citizens wanting to travel to the U.S." The only reference to the Embassy's difficulties in delivering visas is made in the second paragraph, the rest of the long article is devoted to the French catch 22 situation. The article notes: "Matignon is pressuring the Interior" and adds: "All we need now is for Chirac to get involved." A footnote explains the dilemma of French citizens in the West Indies, the Reunion Island and Polynesia.

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Iran

"Europe in Synch With the U.S."

Alexandrine Bouilhet in right-of-center Le Figaro (02/01):
"Rarely has Europe been so much in sync with U.S. diplomacy. Vis--vis Hamas, the EU has adopted a defensive stance, and as Washington asked, it has been brandishing the threat of financial sanctions. Intransigence on the part of the EU seems to have won, including from Paris. where some in Brussels believe they are seeing a softening of France's policy. Regarding Iran, the 'six' also agreed to put the crisis in the hands of the UNSC, as requested by Washington. Events such as the end of the Sharon era, the advent of Hamas and Iran's nuclear ambitions are all playing in favor of the transatlantic relationship. Yet disagreement remains over Iraq, even if Europe and Washington have decided to keep their disagreements quiet. Merkel's presence on the political scene has also helped to shift the balance towards Washington."

"India Caught Between Iran and the West"

Daniel Vernet in left-of-center Le Monde (02/01): "The next step in dealing with the Iran nuclear crisis will depend on the determination of the Europeans, which is not unfailing, and on the attitude adopted by Russia and China, which Teheran is trying, with unequal success, to disassociate from the West. But it will also depend on the position of countries that were once called 'third world' and that today possess nuclear capabilities of their own, namely India. These countries are not insensitive to Teheran's position. India for its part did not sign the NPT or the NTBT and has therefore not broken any of its commitments. But India, in an effort to improve relations with the U.S. did agree to let IAEA inspectors visit its facilities. India's attitude demonstrates the difficult position of a country that would like to respect the rules of the rich and powerful in order to be admitted to the club, but that feels a sense of solidarity with countries that aspire to become nuclear powers."

Hamas

"The Quartet Gives Hamas Time to Recognize Israel"

Marc Roche in left-of-center Le Monde (02/01): "Secretary Rice insisted on the fact that the members of the Quartet were on the same wavelength when it sent its warning to Hamas. The final declaration means that there is a wide consensus among the Quartet's members. Washington appears ready to follow the European lead on financial aid to the Palestinians, giving Hamas time to change its stance on the right for Israel to exist, give up violence and engage in a move to disarm. The goal for the Quartet is also to help Mahmoud Abbas."

"Abbas Tries to Influence Hamas"

Patrick Saint-Paul in right-of-center Le Figaro (02/01):
"Mahmoud Abbas is threatening to resign unless Hamas changes its ways. This has been a consistent attitude on Abbas's part whenever he feels threatened. But today Abbas has become an indispensable interlocutor for Hamas, Israel and the international community and he is using the same threat with more effectiveness in order to impose himself in the crisis opened by Hamas's electoral victory. Mahmoud Abbas the moderate should be able to operate relatively freely in matters of foreign policy, while Hamas will be handling domestic issues." STAPLETON